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ABSTRACT

Based on an examination of well-kept primary source material, this paper presents a personal and professional history of Mary Paxton Keeley, the first woman graduate of one of the first journalism schools in the United States, the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. Starting with her early years, the paper explains that Keeley was a native of Independence, Missouri, who received her bachelor's degree in 1910, two years after the founding of the school. It shows that by her own account, Keeley was the first woman reporter in Kansas City, Missouri, taking a job at the "Post" a week after graduation, and that nearly two decades and a master's degree later, she began the journalism department at Christian, now Columbia, College in Columbia, Missouri, and taught there for a quarter century, dying on December 6, 1986, at age 100. The paper, which examines her life in the context of the changing role of American women at the beginning of this century, with a particular look at women journalists and journalism educators, illustrates the education and career choices available to women at the time. Her pioneer spirit and her full, active life are also emphasized--it is noted that even after retirement she worked in journalism, as an editor, free lance writer, and book reviewer, and that in fact, she became a photojournalist in her seventies. (SKC)

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History Division

SOCIETY GIRL, SOB SISTER, JOURNALISM EDUCATOR: MARY PAXTON KEELEY, THE FIRST WOMAN GRADUATE OF THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AT THE UNIVERISTY OF MISSOURI

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Society Girl, Sob Sister, Journalism Educator:
Mary Paxton Keeley, the First Woman Graduate
of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri

Introduction: A Well Documented Life that Spanned a Century[1]

This paper presents a brief personal and professional history of Mary Paxton Keeley, who was the first woman graduate of one of the first journalism schools in the nation, the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. A native of Independence, Mo., Keeley received her bachelor's degree in 1910, two years after the founding of the school. By her own account, she was the first woman reporter in Kansas City, Mo., taking a job at the Kansas City Post just a week after her graduation. Nearly two decades and a master's degree later, she began the journalism department at Christian, now Columbia, College in Columbia, Mo., and taught there for a quarter of a century. She died Dec. 6, 1986, at age 100.

Her life is examined in the context of the changing role of American women at the beginning of this century, with a particular look at women journalists during the first two decades of the century and women journalism educators during the late 1920s. Keeley's life illustrates the education and career choices available to women during the early part of the century. This paper exemplifies her pioneer spirit--as a journalism student, reporter and educator. It is not an attempt, however, to encompass her entire life. She was journalistically active beyond her retirement from Christian College as an editor, free lance writer and book reviewer. In fact, she became a photojournalist in her 70s. No full biography of Keeley has yet been compiled.

The research consisted in the main of an examination of an unusual amount of well kept primary-source material. Keeley donated her extensive correspondence, manuscripts, journals, photographs, newspaper clipping files, and other material to the Joint Collection of the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection at Columbia and the State Historical Society of Missouri, housed in the Ellis Library of the University of Missouri. Several of Keeley's books are in the Columbia College Library collection. Still other materials consulted include a transcription of an oral history interview with James R. Fuchs of the Harry S Truman Library in Independence, Mo., and an unpublished manuscript, Back in Independence, which she wrote at the insistence of her family. Dr. Joye Patterson, a faculty member of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, is the administrator of Keeley's papers and has this manuscript. Keeley's 1928 master's thesis on the role of the woman's page in newspapers was also examined.

Other sources consulted include Keeley's granddaughter, Linda Scott Keeley Vroman of Glasgow, Mo., and her nephew, William Paxton, an attorney in Independence, Mo., with whom Keeley actively corresponded until a few years ago when she was incapacitated by a stroke.[2] Keeley resided in the Lenoir Retirement Center in Columbia, Mo. until her death. An interview with her was not possible because she was unable to speak.

Other primary source materials exist but were not available for examination. Keeley donated her correspondence with Charles G. Ross to the Truman Library in Independence, Mo., with instructions that the collection not be made public until after her death.[3] These letters were, in Keeley's words, "letters between journalists, nothing mushy."[4]

The Girl and the "New Woman"

Born June 2, 1886, in Independence to John Gallatin Paxton, an influential lawyer with a Virginia education,[5] and Mary Gentry Paxton, an elocution teacher, [6] Mary Paxton's early years coincided with the era of the New Woman, a term which evolved during the late nineteenth century to mean a woman who was better educated and trained than the women of the past. The New Woman definition fit Mary Paxton. The New Woman was willing and able to earn her living, frequently in a job formerly monopolized by men, and hence was under less pressure to marry. She held independent views on all sorts of subjects, including national and international affairs, and was less dependent upon men, both economically and intellectually, than women previously had been. [7] When Keeley later spoke of the New Woman era, she said that in those days women had one motive, one aim: that of being able to work in something besides teaching school.[8]

By sheer coincidence, in 1886, the year of Mary Paxton's birth, Martha Louise Rayne set up a private school in Detroit that was the first school of journalism; it offered practical journalistic training to women.[9] Mrs. Rayne's School of Journalism continued until about 1900.

Women writers were rare, but not novel in the late nineteenth century. During the late 1890s and the early 1900s women wrote novels and contributed significantly to newspapers and magazines.[10] Women had been employed on newspapers as gossip columnists, as editors of women's pages, and sometimes as roving correspondents since the mid-1800s, but only rarely had a woman been hired as a regular reporter on general news stories.[11] By 1889, one of the most famous women reporters, Elizabeth Seaman, alias "Nellie Bly," had traveled around the world in 72 days to prove that a woman could complete the trip in less than the 80 days it had taken the fictional Phileas Fogg. Seaman wrote for the New York World. [12] Still other well known women journalists at the turn of the century included Ida Tarbell, of muckraking fame,[13] and advice columnist and "sob sister" Dorothy Dix, whose real name was Elizabeth Meriwether Gilman.[14]

Mary Paxton does not mention reading these women novelists or reporters as a girl. What she does mention is that she filled her childhood with short story and play writing.[15] She wrote

her first story when she was a little girl. When she was 12, she asked for a typewriter; her father bought her a used Remington. [16] She says she learned to read by reading the Kansas City Star.[17] Her father gave her the first novel he ever read when he thought she was old enough to read her first novel.[18]

Education was important in their family. Mary, the eldest of the five children, and her brother Frank went to the Presbyterian Ladies College in Independence for the equivalent of kindergarten. Their father then surprised them by putting them in the Ott School, a public school.[19] He said that unless people like them went to public schools, those schools would never get any better. Bess Wallace, later Truman, Mary's friend and neighbor, also went to the Ott School.[20] Mary then went to Manual Training School, a four-year experimental high school in Kansas City. Her aunt, Sally Gentry, the second woman to graduate from the University of Missouri at Columbia, taught at Manual, which was perhaps why Mary was sent there.[21] Mary graduated in 1904. Meanwhile, to round out her education, she'd been sent to a Latin tutor at age 10 and took German lessons one summer from another tutor. [22]

Her family's attitude toward education is perhaps best summed up in a 1921 letter from her father, upon the birth of Mary's son: "I want some of my grandchildren to be scholars, not in any narrow sense of the word, but a man who has at his command a knowledge of the universe and its laws; a knowledge of the history of mankind, and a grasp of the spiritual life of the world as manifested in its poets and philosophers. It seems to me that your boy...should be able to take such an education and use it as a means to add to his happiness, usefulness and power."[23]

Mrs. Paxton died in 1903 from tuberculosis.[24] Mary then spent the year after high school graduation helping her father and the household servants with housekeeping chores and care of the younger children.[25] She writes that she was so unhappy after her mother's death that her father said she could go away to college. She looked at ads in a magazine and picked one in Virginia, where her father had grown up. She says she wrote for a catalog, was accepted, then was on her way to Hollins College.[26]

Between 1860 and 1920, going to college had become an accepted part of growing up for women in certain social groups. [27] Female collegians came from a range of families within the broad and expanding middle class, often headed by professionals such as lawyers, [28] as Mary's father was. Many of these fathers had been brought up in the antebellum tradition of intellectual and social reform and they viewed college education for both sexes as the path to a fuller life, intellectually, socially and economically.[29] Some of the mothers had taught school before marriage and instilled the habit of family reading,[30] as Mary's mother had. For such parents, education approximated a religion, a means toward the improvement of self and society. For many of their daughters and sons, college became a logical step in their intellectual and social advancement.[31]

Journalism Education Begins

After a year, Mary Paxton left Hollins College for the University of Chicago to stay with a cousin. She said then that she wanted to study journalism.[32] Her father told her when he learned of this career choice, "But you don't need it; you'll get married." [33] The University told her they didn't teach journalism, but that the University of Missouri was starting a journalism school. [34]

She was so eager to begin the study of journalism that she arrived in Columbia, Mo., in January 1908 and took courses until the school opened that fall.[35] The University had begun formal teaching of journalism in 1878, offering a course in the English Department on the history of journalism.[36] However, in 1908 it began a two-year curriculum to prepare graduates for newspaper work. Courses included history and principles of journalism, newspaper making, newspaper administration, magazine journalism, newspaper publishing, newspaper jurisprudence, news-gathering, correspondence and office equipment.[37]

Columbia then was a town with a population of slightly less than ten thousand, reached by branch lines of the Wabash and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railway companies. It had one daily and two weekly newspapers; two monthly farm journals were published there.[38] Enrollment in the entire University for the 1908-09 year was 2,944. [39]

The new school of journalism opened September 14, 1908[40] with 97 students--84 men and 13 women.[41] That is about 13 percent women. To gain some perspective on the proportion of women enrolled in the journalism school, it is useful to look at national figures for college enrollment. The female proportion of the total college population rose from 21.0 percent in 1870 to 39.6 percent in 1910. [42] This remarkable growth occurred at a time when most Americans did not receive even a high school diploma. Athough almost as many women as men became collegians by 1920, they were nevertheless rarities among the nation's young women.[43]

Furthermore, for every woman who aspired to higher education, there were many more in her social group who did not.[44] In 1870, the percentage of college women among those 18 to 21 years old was only 0.7 percent; by 1900 it had increased to 2.8 percent and by 1910, it was 3.8 percent. [45]

Mary Paxton arrived in Columbia to learn that one of her professors would be Charles Ross, a young man with whom she had been corresponding for at least two years and with whom she had gone out once before, the summer they were both in Independence on vacation.[46] That outing had been a hurried one: Independence parents insisted their daughters terminate buggy rides by 6 p.m. or else risk being branded "fast."

She and Ross began dating steadily in Columbia during the spring of 1909. She lived at the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house with 18 other women; she was the only student in the University to own a typewriter, her old second-hand Remington which was noisy as a threshing machine and almost as heavy.[47] Her small room in the Kappa house was named "Hell," probably

because of "my old desk and mess of papers. It was a typical journalist's desk but it irritated my roommate, Helen Ross, so much that I arrived once just in time to keep her from throwing it out the window."[48]

The professor-student status of their relationship had drawbacks for each of them. It was at times embarrassing for Ross to be seen with her.[49] She forfeited work on the Columbia Missourian copydesk; Ross taught that class and he was afraid other students would think him partial because it was common knowledge that they were dating.[50] That summer Ross visited her in Independence and they came to an understanding that they would eventually be married.[51]

Mary, meanwhile was a busy journalism student. She sold her first free lance article, a piece on the women's protest against tearing down the old Boone County courthouse.[52] She organized women students to be on the Savitar staff; they marched in to the yearbook office together and confronted the all-male staff. They said they didn't want women on the staff because they couldn't then smoke at their meetings.[53] But the women soon were included.

Walter Williams, dean of School of Journalism, wanted a woman in the first graduating class and therefore offered Mary Paxton extra work to give her the appropriate amount of course credits.[54] She says she dumped a box of rejection slips for free lance work on his desk, proof that she had done the required extra work for magazine publication. Williams asked if she had had anything at all published. She had: one article, for which she got $5.[55] Williams then completed the necessary paperwork for her graduation. She joined five men in the first graduating class in 1910.[56] By this time, there were more than 4,000 women in writing and editing jobs across the country.[57]

Williams asked the only woman in the first graduating class to select the color of the tassel for the graduation mortar board. Like Mark Twain, Mary Paxton liked any color "just so it was red," so red it was, and has been ever since.[58]

The Kansas City Post, "Delivered Anywhere on Earth for 10 Cents a Week," announced the graduation of Mary Paxton:

> "John G. Paxton left this morning for Columbia, where his oldest daughter, just entering her twenties, will graduate from the school of journalism.
>
> "Miss Mary Paxton will be the first woman in the West to receive the degree. Miss Paxton is a society girl and has always had literary ability.
>
> "...In 1910 she was chosen for editor of the woman's department of the Independent, the university paper, which position she resigned because of the attitude of the paper toward the dean of the department of journalism.
>
> "She is a practical printer, having learned to set type in a newspaper office at Independence. She has studied playground work and some of her articles on this subject have been printed in Eastern magazines.

"On returning to Independence from Columbia she will go north and spend the summer on the Thousand Isles on the St. Lawrence river."[59]

The Post had started publication in March 1906, [60] as competition to the Star and Times. In 1909, Fred G. Bonfils and Harry H. Tammen, owners of the Denver Post, [61] the yellowest of yellow journals, [62] invaded Kansas City, buying the Post, then three years old and having a hard time, for about $250,000. The two attempted to apply in Kansas City, which was accustomed to the restrained news presentation of the Star, the wild and woolly journalism which had been successful for them in Denver. They did succeed in building up a circulation of 190,000, but large advertisers remained aloof. [63]

The story the Post carried about Mary Paxton was fraught with errors. She was 24 years old when she graduated, not just entering her twenties. Her public records don't include information about her printing or typesetting abilities: she never mentioned it to interviewers. Finally, she did not head for the Thousand Isles: she graduated on Tuesday and the following Monday began reporting for the Post. [64]

She said she landed the job on the Post after the Star refused to hire a woman.[65] Charles Ross had reluctantly agreed that she should work for a while after her graduation to satisfy some of her desire for a career before their marriage.[66] Winifred Black Bonfils, one of the earliest and best known of the sob sister reporters,[67] worked for the Hearst papers. She had come to first Journalism Week, now an annual event of the School of Journalism. According to Mary Paxton Keeley, Black asked her, "What are you going to do with your life when you graduate?" She said she didn't know.[68]

Black saw in her a kindred spirit and urged her to apply for a reporting job on the Hearst-like Post. [69] Here, as the first woman reporter in Kansas City, she scored success after success with her articles. Her celebrity made the idea of marriage to Ross pale by comparison.[70]

In an interview in the Columbia Missourian, December 24, 1957, Mary Paxton Keeley recalled: "In those days a woman reporter was pretty rare west of the Mississippi. I became such a curiosity that people used to come into the office and just stare at me." And of her work on the Post: "I knew I was a pioneer and I knew I had to behave with a certain amount of dignity because nobody would follow me. I didn't ask for any quarter. There was one, an assistant editor, who sent me to the worst places he could think of. I went right on. I wasn't trying to prove anything."[71]

The other women on the paper were society-page editors. Mary lived at home; her father sent her brother to the end of the car line to meet her when she got off work. Her hours were from 8 a.m.to 5 p.m. every day and then on Saturday until 11 p.m. She worked for $8 a week; her father got mad after about a year and went to see Charlie Bonfils, telling him that he ought to pay

her more. Mary Paxton says this made her angry with her father: "I would have paid them to let me be on it."[72]

Not that her family was happy that she worked for the Post. She embarrassed her father when she accepted the job; everyone knew the paper was the one of the most sensational in the country next to the Hearst publications.[73]

She found that her journalism education was deficient in at least one area: She had not learned to punctuate or spell in the School of Journalism, and the faculty had not told her how bad she was in these basic skills. When she got to the Post, she was asked if she could do cleaner copy. She quickly learned to punctuate and to spell.[74]

She was a reporter during a period of great social reforms, including those for higher wages, better working conditions, slum clearance, prohibition, better sex information and improved recreational facilities.[75] In addition, there was a great deal of work being done by suffragists throughout the country. [76] Mary Paxton's assignment files reflect those times, and also show the work she was sent to cover.[77] Some headlines from her stories give an example of the journalism of the time:

"Mother Gets License for Girl, 16; Groom, 18."

"Girl Causes Arrest of Father and Woman."

"Father Arrested on Complaint of His Own Daughter; Girl Objects to Living With 'Stepmother' When Own Mother is Away."

"Advocate of Free Love Charged With Abandoning Child; Man Duped Six Young Girls by Passing Himself Off as Unmarried."

There is also a series of articles on a girls' hotel fundraising effort in her files which gives an example of the conditions for working women at the time: "The new girls' hotel will accommodate 150 girls with a comfortable home within their means. It is for the purpose of housing part of the 4,000 women here who earn less than $5 a week with the kind of shelter that society owes them...Statistics have been compiled by the state labor bureau about the wages of the factory women. They number 4,566 here, 129 of whom make less than $3 a week; 204 from $3 to $4 a week; ...and only 304 of whom earn $15 a week and over....of the 30,000 women in Kansas City who work, there are 4,000 of them who have no home." Only the date 1910 appears on that clipping.[78]

There are stories about suffragists. Of a Miss Laura Gregg, a speaker at a women's club meeting, Mary Paxton wrote: "She is pretty, she is convincing, she is satisfying and she does not rant. It is no wonder that all the women wish that their husbands could hear her in order that they could know that a sane woman and a womanly woman does believe in suffrage."[79]

And, in an article on the woman's athletic club reducing class she writes: "Yes, the reducing class actually reduces. No woman who weighs less than 175 pounds is admitted. They roll across

the room, those 'women with the ruffled chins.'...The secret is out....They roll from one wall to the other and back again across the smooth gymnasium floor. If anyone gets in the way no pauses are made, and the least plump woman is rolled over...."

There are also clips on the coverage of a young women's "Don't Marry" Club where 25 girls took an oath to remain single.[80]

Other files contain clips of a Sylvia Pankhurst lecture on suffrage; fashions; Easter merchandise; articles on spring bonnets; and the new bathing suit.

The several-deck headline on another Paxton clip reads: "Women Today are Slaves, She Says; Emma Goldman, Anarchist, Declares Our Love Has Been a Failure; Marriage a Mockery; Why Shouldn't an Able-Bodied Woman Support Herself? She Asks." The copy accompanying the photo of Goldman reads: "Looks Peaceful But is Warlike." [81] Keeley's personal papers folder number 301 in the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection contains a fragment of an article on Goldman written by someone else. On it, Keeley scrawled, "I interviewed her and her free lover."

Mary Paxton Keeley's assignment collection also includes clips on society weddings, child dancers, Y.W.C.A. activities, and a series of stories on the free lectures sponsored by the Post on the care of babies. Keeley scrawled on one of these: "I had to organize and conduct this school for mothers once when the nurse failed to show up."[82]

She writes in an unpublished manuscript in her files in the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection that one of the most exciting things she did as a reporter was to ride in an observation kite over the city.[83] Her picture and story appeared on the front page of the paper: "The next morning, though I could hardly bear the suspense, I delayed coming down to breakfast as long as I could. From the dining room I could see Papa unhappily reading the Post.

"Frank (her brother) glared at me. 'This is the most disgusting thing you've done yet. Everyone in Independence will be scandalized.'

"There on the front page in the right hand top two columns, I hung from the kite as Ralph had photographed me, and under the photograph I saw my first by-line.

"I must have beamed, but Papa shook his head. 'My dear daughter, I knew no good would come from your going to work on that wretched paper. Surely I do not have to tell you that no lady ever permits her name to appear in the public press if she can help it, much less her face.'"[84]

While Mary was enjoying this notoriety, Charles Ross was contributing heavily to the support of his family in Independence; his sisters were nearing college age, and the added financial responsibility of a wife made him delay their wedding even longer.[85] Thus, despite a marathon correspondence that included more than 400 letters, they continued to drift apart. By the summer of 1911, the distances separating them and their difficulty in getting together brought their relationship to only a shadow of what it once had been. They never quarreled, but neither did they compromise their positions, she on her career, he on his financial responsibilities. [86]

They never married one another, yet continued their correspondence until Ross's death in 1950. During an interview for the Missourian SUNDAY Magazine on June 8, 1975, Keeley said she had put together a collection of 20 sonnets, written to a lost lover whose identity "You'll just have to guess." This collection, donated to the Harry S Truman Library, was to be made public after her death. Today, portraits of Ross and Keeley hang across from one another in the seminar room of the Graduate Studies Center of the School of Journalism's Walter Williams Hall.

Mary Paxton worked on the Post for 15 months before an appendicitis attack on the streetcar home landed her in the hospital; she then had a three-week recuperation period. [87] She couldn't go back to the Post. This illness and a lingering sadness over her break-up with Ross caused her to spend the next two years with cousins on a Mississippi plantation.[88]

She returned to Independence ready to work again, but was unable to land a job. The Post did call her back to do an investigative story on the girls' reformatory in Chillicothe, Mo., however, which took several months.[89] Prostitution flourished during the early part of the twentieth century.[90] This was due, in part, to the explosive growth of the cities. Mary Paxton's Chillicothe assignment was to investigate the woman warden at the girls' reformatory.[91] What she discovered was a prostitution ring set up by the warden, who had a ready supply of young girls to send to Kansas City whorehouses.[92]

Transition Years: To Home Economics and Back

That assignment over, she consulted Dean Walter Williams about what to do next. If she got her job back on the paper, she faced being assigned to the Y.W.C.A. and the Board of Education, which she considered dull. She longed to cover the police court, but even the tough editors thought that place unfit for a woman reporter.[93] Prejudice against women newspaper reporters at the time was great; Williams therefore suggested she specialize in home economics journalism.[94] This was a solution to discrimination that women journalism teachers would later offer their female students in the 1920s: home economics journalism would translate into jobs writing articles for women's pages and magazines.[95] In fact, in the mid-1920s, home economics flourished and the fascination with scientific homemaking extended to journalism schools in the form of courses taught by women in the art of "Writing for the Home Pages.[96]

Thus, Keeley went to the University of Chicago to study home economics journalism for nearly a year, then went first to Alabama, then to Virginia, to do home economics extension work.[97]

But along came World War I and an enthusiastic public effort to involve women in all sorts of war work. Women were urged to grow and save food, work for the Red Cross, make bandages, and more. [98] Mary Paxton, by that time engaged to E.B. Keeley, another extension agent, felt the pull to volunteer for work overseas. Keeley was deaf and couldn't go, and he

didn't want her to go. She told him that it was possible to get married every day but possible to go to war only in every third generation.[99] She was stationed in France for 10 months and lived with the troops, doing canteen work. Only one woman, Peggy Hull, a Kansas farm girl, was accredited to the American Expeditionary Forces as a reporter by the War Department.[100] Mary Paxton compiled a list of words she kept in her diary from her 10 months overseas, later writing "A.E.F. English," which was published in American Speech, Vol. V, No. 5, June 1930.[101] Keeley's war diary, written on her trusty portable typewriter, was donated to the Missouri Historical Society.[102] She married Keeley upon her return in 1919.

During the war, the absence of men had offered professional women greater advancement possibilities and the government, as part of its general program of bolstering citizen morale, had encouraged them to organize. These experiences heightened their consciousness of their role as professionals and of discrimination within their professions. When the war ended, new professional women's associations appeared in many fields, including dentistry, architecture, and journalism.[103]

This heightened national consciousness did Mary Paxton Keeley little good, however. The Keeleys spent the next few years at Curles Neck Farm in Virginia, where he was the manager.[104] There they had a son, John Gallatin Paxton Keeley. When the boy was five, his father died, leaving Mary the child's sole support. She returned to Missouri to become a home economics extension agent in Holt County. Women journalists still weren't being accepted; this was the only job she could get.[105]

Later, John Staples, then editor of the Atchison County Mail in Rockport, Mo., offered her a job as a roving correspondent for his paper. "I wrote a column, sold advertising, did a little bit of everything," she says.[106]

A year later, illness forced her to resign and return to the family home in Independence. Here she wrote River Gold, a book for boys which was acclaimed in local and national reviews. It was published by the Bobbs-Merrill company. Her files in the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection contain reviews of this book, dated February and March of 1928, from The New York Times Book Review, the Kansas City Star, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Detroit Free Press and other publications. Keeley said the book didn't cost much, maybe $2.00. Published during the late 20s, "it didn't make much money, but no books did," she said.[107]

When she was ready to return to work, her father reminded her that there was only one paved road in the county; he felt that her physique was such that she couldn't go bouncing over the other roads. He suggested that she teach school so she could have the same hours as her young son.[108]

Her Teaching Career

To teach, she needed a master's degree, so she returned to the University of Missouri and the School of Journalism. She and her son lived in a Catholic sorority house, where she had a job as a chaperon.[109] This twist of her professional fate is ironic, in view of the philosphy of the New Woman. However, it reflected economic reality. The most popular profession for women, as had been the case earlier, was teaching. Well over half of the women in the censuses of 1910 and 1920 who were engaged in some profession were teachers. [110]

Her master's thesis, "The Appeal of the Woman's Page," was approved July 2, 1928. [111] Keeley says this was the first investigation of the subject that had been made. She searched through journalism bulletins, magazine indices, and books published as journalism texts and for journalists, failing to find any material of any use in the investigation.[112]

Her primary sources were 16 Missouri papers and 10 papers from Midwestern cities. She also sent a questionnaire to Missouri women who read the papers: 196 rural women responded as did 263 urban women. She took Missouri women to be representative of those of the country as a whole.

She wanted to find out what editors thought women wanted to read on the woman's page and did this by extrapolating from a content analysis of the papers themselves. From the questionnaires, she determined what women wanted to read on that page. She then compared the data. Hers was a thesis that reflected the interest in home economics at the time.

She found that editors were devoting 51.2 percent of the entire space of the woman's page to serial fiction. Yet, only 5.6 percent of the women said they read the paper for entertainment. The editors devoted nearly four times as much space to serials as to clothing, and about six times as much space to serials as to food. Clothing and food, however, were the first and second-ranking subjects of interest among women.

Editors placed advice columns about fourth on the list, in terms of column inches devoted to them; women placed them farther down, at about number 12. No woman wanted more advice columns.

The game of bridge was number nine on the editors' list. Women ranked it last; the largest number of respondents said to get rid of this feature.

In her thesis summary, Keeley writes: "It seems to me that the editor's idea of the relative value of types of material and the woman's view will be as far apart as they are now as long as men decide what is to go on the woman's page and until the women who do edit the woman's page become trained in home economics."

She supports this position with quotes from the School's Journalism Week speakers, such as Benjamin H. Reese, managing editor of the St. Louis Star. Reese's remarks echo the scientific homemaking trend: "We have an idea that we are drawing very close to the thinking woman; not as close as we should be, or will be....The newspaper woman of this day, and a future day in

American journalism , must know eugenics better than she knows the elements of scandal. She must know hygiene. She must know structural and basic politics. She must know economics and finance in their broader aspects even though she may not know them in detailed analysis. If she does not know these things, she will know less than thousands of women for whom she will be called upon to write."[113]

It was the Depression when Keeley got her master's degree in journalism. By the end of the 1920s, however, women were 24 percent of the profession, numbering about 12,000. Most of their jobs, nonetheless, were still on the woman's pages, on magazines or in book publishing.[114] To Keeley, a job as a society editor was still the dullest thing to do. [115]

So when the offer from the president of Christian College in Columbia came to teach journalism there and to start a newspaper, Keeley accepted it.[116] She held the position for the next quarter century. At the time she joined the Christian College faculty, the School of Journalism had only two women out of 19 faculty members--Helen Josephine Scott and Frances Dabney Grinstead. Both had the rank of instructor. [117]

Nationally, women college presidents and teachers numbered about 10,000 by the end of the 1920s but most were in the lower ranks of the profession and in institutions of little prestige, doing hack work for a pittance.[118] Riegel writes that while many people felt optimistic about the future of women in collegiate teaching, women college instructors remained a rarity for a long time.

To Keeley's surprise, she liked teaching. Every other Sunday afternoon she had her advisees come to her house to bake cookies and drink tea. There they would work on the school newspaper, The Microphone, which Keeley had started. She was lively, even a bit eccentric and was known for her short haircuts and penchant for riding a bicycle to classes.[119]

Keeley kept up her own writing while teaching at Christian. For a time in the 1930s, she was the managing editor of The Missouri Clubwoman, the official publication of the Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs, "A Group of Women in Every Community Who Can Be Depended Upon to Promote All Movements Looking Toward the Betterment of Life." [120]

She wrote about a range of subjects, too. Her files contain published manuscripts on the following: hooked rugs (1926), college publicity (1933), and use of the local newspaper by rural schools to inform the community (1934). An excerpt of the last article is informative: "If the teacher is timid and wants a special introduction to the editor, let her bear him a gift of the largest turnip in the school district, and this, after he has thanked her, he will place along with the name of the grower in his window, where all the world may view it..." [121]

Keeley became known for her creativity and turned out plays, poems and essays during this period as well. Yet in an interview with Elta Thomas for her master's thesis, Missouri Poets of the Twentieth Century, University of Kansas, October 1, 1937, Keeley wrote, "My principal creative work is my son, John Gallatin Paxton Keeley, now 14, a high-ranking scout. He says his theme

song is, 'Journalistic Mama, get your copy on time.' Most of my time is spent making a living for him. I am a better mother and teacher than I am a poet and a much better cook. You'd agree to this last if you ate my hot rolls with honey."

Mary Paxton Keeley is a woman whose career was shaped by the times in which she lived. Her burning ambition during her charmed childhood in Independence was to be a writer. Perhaps she was not the sort of journalist she hoped to be: the times discriminated against her, family responsibilities dictated otherwise, occasional illness sidetracked her. On her 90th birthday, she told a Columbia Missourian reporter that she had a ..."germ of writing. You know when you have the writing germ you're restless when you're not writing and irritated when you are because you think you're not doing as well as you want." Keeley may have been denied professional opportunities because of her sex, but she made others for herself. Only a severe stroke in her late nineties stemmed the personal correspondence, letters to the editor, jingles and other writing she turned out daily on her large-print typewriter.

She did not receive national notoriety as a journalist, although her boys' book, River Gold, earned national publicity. Her contributions as a journalist of statewide stature are hard to assess. What is known of her 15-month stint at the Post is limited, yet more thorough research of that period is difficult. The clippings in her personal files marked "assignment days" carry no bylines and are undated, and the paper itself is not indexed.

Keeley's greatest achievements may well be found in the influence she had as a teacher at Christian College. Hundreds of young women were her journalism students; further research to identify them and trace their contributions to the profession might be fruitful.

Another aspect of Keeley's life worth probing is that of her "career" after her retirement. She was, by turns, a self-taught photojournalist, a civic organizer for the arts in Columbia and an avid gardener who wrote a column for the Kansas City Star.

Too, Keeley's connections by blood and friendship to historic figures may also be worth further study. Her mother's family played a major role in the settlement of Columbia, Mo. Bess Wallace, her girlhood friend, married Harry Truman; Keeley was the godmother of Margaret Truman, their daughter. Charles Ross, with whom she corresponded until his death in 1950, won a Pulitzer prize for reporting and served as Truman's press secretary during his presidency.

The richness of Keeley's life illuminates our understanding of what it meant to be an educated woman with career expectations well ahead of those that society sanctioned in the early part of the 20th century. Her life deserves full examination; there is more to learn from its 100 years.

FOOTNOTES

[1]In original form, this was a research paper written in the fall 1986 for "History and Principles of Journalism," a graduate course in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri taught by Dr. Robert Kahan.

[2] Her nephew has a collection of correspondence which was not to be made public until after her death. Telephone conversation with William Paxton, Mary Paxton Keeley's nephew, an attorney in Independence, Mo., May 15, 1986.

[3] Telephone conversation with Dennis Bilger, librarian at the Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Mo., May 5, 1986. Keeley left a box of personal papers to the Library with handwritten instructions that the correspondence with Charles Ross be closed to the public until after her death. Ross was a faculty member at the School of Journalism and was later President Harry S Truman's press secretary. He and Keeley had been engaged during her journalism student days. Ross died in 1950.

[4] Cassette recording of Mary Paxton Keeley's oral history interview with the staff of the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo., October 30, 1974. The tapes are not transcribed.

[5]Mary Paxton Keeley, Mary Gentry and John Gallatin Paxton: A Memoir (Chillicothe, Mo.: The Community Press, 1967), p.110.

[6]Ibid p. 101.

[7]Robert E. Riegel, American Women, A Story of Social Change, Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), p.240.

[8]Cassette recording, op.cit.

[9]Maurine Beasley, "Women in Journalism Education: The Formative Period, 1908-1930," Journalism History, Vol. 13, No.1, Spring 1986. p.10.

[10]Riegel, op. cit., p. 278.

[11] Lois W. Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 36.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Marion Marzolf, Up From the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists (New York: Hastings House, 1977), p. 41.

[14]Ibid. p. 36.

[15]Mary Paxton Keeley, Back in Independence, unpublished manuscript, in Dr. Joye Patterson's possession, University of Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, Mo.

[16]The Columbia Daily Tribune, June 8, 1975.

[17]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Mary Paxton Keeley, oral history interview with James R. Fuchs, Harry S Truman Library, recorded in Columbia, Mo., July 12, 1966 and transcribed, November 1966.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Mary Paxton Keeley interview, The Kansas City Star, July 27,1975.

[22]Truman Library oral history, op. cit., p. 5.

[23] Letter from Mary's father, John G. Paxton, to E.B. Keeley, her husband, October 21, 1921. From the personal collection of Linda Scott Keeley Vroman, Mary Paxton Keeley's granddaughter.

[24]Truman Library oral history,op. cit.

[25]Ibid., p. 6.

[26]Mary Paxton Keeley's personal papers in file 848 of the Joint Collection of the Western Historical Manuscripts and State Historical Society, University of Missouri at Columbia. Folder number 260.

[27]Barbara Miller Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 78.

[28]Ibid. p. 64.

[29]Ibid. p. 65.

[30]Ibid. p. 66.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Cassette recording, op cit.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Truman Library oral history, op. cit.

[35]Mary Paxton Keeley interview, The Kansas City Star, June 1, 1966.

[36]Beasley, op cit.,p. 10.

[37]Ibid. p. 11.

[38]Sara Lockwood Williams, Twenty Years of Education for Journalism (Columbia, Mo.: E.W. Stephens Publishing, 1929), p. 23.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid. p. 24.

[41]Beasley, op. cit., p. 11.

[42]Solomon, op. cit., p. 62.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid. p. 63.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ronald T. Farrar, The Reluctant Servant: The Story of Charles G. Ross (Columbia, Mo.:

University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 50.

[47]Mary Paxton Keeley, "Bustles to Bluejeans," the Kappa Kappa Gamma centennial publication, 1875 to 1975, p.11.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Farrar, op. cit.

[50]The Kansas City Star, July 27, 1975, op.cit.

[51]Farrar, op. cit.

[52]The Columbia Tribune, op. cit.

[53]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[54]Mary Paxton Keeley, "Good For Something," Writer's Monthly, A Journal for All Who Write, October 1949, p. 205.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Beasley, op. cit., p. 12.

[57]Marzolf, op. cit., p. 32.

[58]Mary Paxton Keeley interview, The Missouri Alumnus, June 1952, Vol. 40, no. 10. p. 9.

[59]The Kansas City Post, June 6, 1910.

[60]The archives of the Missouri State Historical Society, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia.

[61] Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: a History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 566.

[62]Ibid. p. 567.

[63]Ibid. p. 566.

[64]Truman Library oral history, op. cit., p. 8.

[65]The Kansas City Star, July 27, 1975, op. cit.

[66]Farrar, op. cit., p. 50.

[67]Marzolf, op. cit., p. 33.

[68]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[69]Farrar, op. cit., p. 51.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Cassette recording, op cit.

[72]Ibid.

[73]The Kansas City Star, June 1, 1966, op. cit.

[74]Cassette recording, op cit.

[75]Riegel, op. cit., p. 272.

[76]Ibid., p. 302.

[77]Keeley personal papers in file 848, op. cit., folder 267.

[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848,op. cit., folder 269.

[82]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848,op. cit., folder 270.

[83]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848, op. cit., folder 268.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Farrar, op. cit.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Truman Library oral history, op. cit., p. 9.

[88]Ibid., p. 10.

[89]Ibid.,p. 11.

[90]Banner, op. cit., p. 75.

[91]Truman Library oral history, op. cit.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[94]Truman Library oral history, op. cit.

[95]Beasley, op. cit., p. 15.

[96]Marzolf, op.cit., p. 250.

[97]Truman Library oral history, op. cit.

[98]Riegel, op. cit., p. 274.

[99]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[100]Marzolf, op. cit., p. 42.

[101]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848, op. cit., folder 263.

[102]The Columbia Tribune, op. cit.

[103]Banner, op. cit., p. 138.

[104]Truman Library oral history, op. cit., p. 16.

[105]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid.

[108]Truman Library oral history, op. cit., p. 18.

[109]Cassette recording, op. cit.

[110]Riegel, op.cit., p. 276.

[111]Mary Paxton Keeley, "The Appeal of the Woman's Page," unpublished master's thesis, University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo., July 2, 1928.

[112]Ibid.,

[113]Ibid.
[114]Marzolf, op. cit., p. 52.
[115]Cassette recording, op. cit.
[116]Ibid.
[117]Williams, op. cit., p. 455.
[118]Riegel, op. cit., p. 277.
[119]Mary Paxton Keeley interview, The Kansas City Times, April 17, 1969.
[120]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848, op. cit.
[121]Mary Paxton Keeley personal papers, file 848, op. cit., folder 263.